

FISH and WILDLIFE COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET

Meeting Date: October 13, 2016

Agenda Item: Brucellosis Proposed 2017 Annual Work Plan

Division: Wildlife

Action Needed: Final

Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation: 20 Min

Background

In January 2013, the Commission endorsed elk management recommendations from a citizen working group for use in areas with brucellosis (the Designated Surveillance Area as described by the Montana Department of Livestock). The Commission also recognized the need for annual work plans based upon these recommendations. The annual work plans describe specific management actions available for implementation. The proposed 2017 annual work plan represents the fifth iteration of annual plans and builds upon the 2013 - 2016 plans and experience gained through implementation of these previous plans. The proposed 2017 plan largely restates the 2016 plan to include hazing, limited fencing, limited lethal removal of elk, habitat modifications, and other efforts to adjust elk distribution away from cattle at small scales to mitigate the risk of brucellosis transmission from elk to cattle. This proposed work plan also includes the potential for local work groups to propose modifications or additions to the 2017 plan to the Commission at a later date.

As a definitive change from the language initially adopted for public review at the August Commission meeting, the final proposed 2017 annual work plan proposed new additional language that identifies areas in Montana adjacent to other states' DSA for possible implementation of risk mitigation tools approved by the Commission. These tools would be limited only to those options the Commission ultimately approves in their final adoption of a 2017 work plan. Hazing or lethal removal of elk to redistribute exposed elk away from other elk is not part of this final proposal from FWP.

Public Involvement Process & Results

The public comment opportunity ran from the August 11 Commission meeting through 5 p.m. Monday, Sept. 12. Nine comments were received and forwarded to the Commission in addition to meeting notes from the July 5 citizen work group meeting. Comments included limited support for the 2016 plan with concern for any expansion of available tools, a focus on habitat, and advocacy for additional tools to keep exposed elk away from other elk that are not known to be exposed.

Agency Recommendation & Rationale

FWP recommends adoption of the proposed 2017 annual work plan that essentially restates earlier plans and also includes new language making existing tools available for potential use in areas near other states' DSAs. This limited but important expansion reflects competing concerns FWP has heard from those anxious that the plan is too ambitious and also from those concerned the plan is not enough.

Alternatives and Analysis

The proposal may be adopted as presented or with adjustment per FWP justifications, public comment, and Commission discussion.

Proposed Motion

I move the Fish and Wildlife Commission adopt as final the proposed 2017 annual work plan for elk management in areas with brucellosis as presented by FWP.